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NATIONAL TRENDS REPORT
FOR THE MONTH OF JULY, AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2017

Prepared by: the Office of Informal Conflict Management, Employment and Social Development Canada

NOTE: The following information provided herein is solely the opinions and observations of the OICM Practitioners and Coordinators.
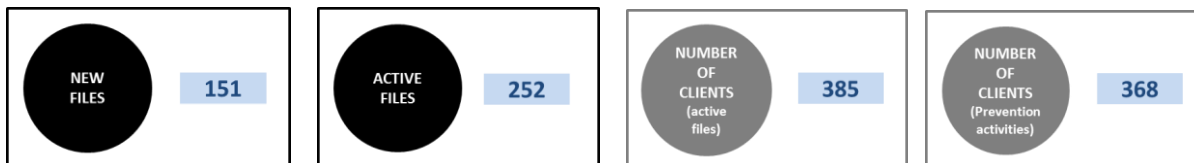
CONTEXT

Enacted in 2005, the Informal Conflict Management System (ICMS) service introduced simpler, cost effective and timely options for addressing disputes related to people management. In Section 207 of the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* (PSLRA), it mandates that all federal departments must have access to the ICMS.

At Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Office of Informal Conflict Management (OICM) delivers service excellence in the field of conflict management to all ESDC employees, including Service Canada and the Labour Program. OICM guiding principles include neutrality, confidentiality, timeliness, and good faith.

OICM has launched an initiative to gather information from its practitioners and coordinators and to develop a quarterly trends report, identifying observed trends that have a potential to lead to conflict in various areas and regions of the organization. This document presents the second quarterly report, being published in fiscal year 2017-18.

DATA
2017-18 2nd Quarter (July 1st to September 30, 2017)

NEW FILES	ACTIVE FILES	NUMBER OF CLIENTS (active files)	NUMBER OF CLIENTS (Prevention activities)
151	252	385	368

CONSULTATION	COACHING	MEDIATION & FACILITATED CONVERSATION	GROUP PROCESS	PREVENTION ACTIVITIES
246	100	14	3	19
Discuss a work situation in which you are directly or indirectly involved and explore options to manage it	Develop your conflict management skills and find creative, effective and constructive ways to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts on your own.	Discuss with the other party in an attempt to understand each other's point of view and generate solutions.	Identify the issues causing conflict(s) and explore options for resolving them within your group in order to increase its efficiency.	To develop conflict competency in employees and increase awareness of OICM services (Coaching Programs, WebEx workshops, other workshops, presentations.)

Consultations and coaching services are the most frequently accessed at ESDC; services that allow employees to develop their own strategies to address specific challenges. Mediation/facilitated discussions and group processes are less frequently used, due in part to the time and emotional investment required by parties. Moreover, training continues to be a priority as skill development is the most significant opportunity for preventing conflict and effectively resolving/managing workplace conflict.

NATIONAL AND/OR REGIONAL TRENDS

Supervisors in new and/or acting positions
- Managers and Team Leaders are frequently taking too much responsibility on their shoulders for employees' conflict situations.
  (Confirmed by BC and ON)

- High turnover in supervisory positions contributing to a lack of consistency in leadership.
  (Confirmed by all Regions)

- Group service requests may be used as a way to directly address specific issues with one employee, in hopes this individual will indirectly receive the message to behave differently.
  (Confirmed by ON, ATL, BC and AB)

- An incoming supervisor (either manager or team leader) may encounter a difficult behavior of an employee, and discover that many of the challenges with this employee are ongoing issues that were not addressed by previous supervisors. When the new supervisor attempts to address these difficult behaviours, they are met with resistance from the employee. Quite often in these circumstances, these supervisors feel that they are lacking support from their superiors in addressing these difficult behaviors.
  (Confirmed by ATL and ON)

- Managers and Team Leaders that are "acting" at times face resentment and resistance, as they are supervising former colleagues, knowing that at some point they will return to their old position. This resistance also occurs from employees believing that they do not have to do what an "acting" says, as is or her status is only temporary. This is especially difficult for acting supervisors that are in the role for less than 4 months.
  (Confirmed by ATL, NHQ, ON, AB)

Front-end staff
- It is challenging for front-end staff to access training from OICM, due to set hours in Services Centers, which contributes to limit possibilities to improve their communication and share concerns with colleagues and management.
  (Confirmed by all regions)

Smaller offices
- Smaller offices comprise of 3 employees seem to have higher frequency of conflict among peers.
  (Confirmed by ON, AB, NHQ, ATL)

Using "absenteeism/presenteeism" as a strategy
- Sick leave and other forms of absenteeism being used to avoid conflict.
  (Confirmed by all regions)

- There is an impact on productivity with a number of more experienced staff, who are eligible to retire and choose to remain at work for personal reason, but are affected by burnout, or are less engaged, which in turn creates tension among members of a team.
  (Confirmed by AB and ATL)

Increased uptake of OICM services
- Consistent increase in overall demand for OICM services has been observed over the past few years, especially in September once summer holidays have ended.
  (Confirmed by all regions)

Phoenix Pay System
- A great number of employees are experiencing difficulty in receiving proper payment from the pay system, and it is creating a certain level of distress, as their financial security is at risk, which has a potential to impact interactions with clients and colleagues.
  (Confirmed by all regions)

- The Phoenix pay system is creating tense situations in the work environment. While this is more of a systemic issue, it is noteworthy as OICM needs to be aware of how this dynamic affects interpersonal workplace relationships.
  (Confirmed by ATL, BC and PQ)

Mental Health
- Conflict related to Mental Health issues is becoming more prevalent in the workplace.
  (Confirmed by AB, ATL, NHQ)

Lack of Recognition
- Lack of recognition as a driver of conflict in the workplace is also becoming more apparent. Examples include: no recognition for an acting team leader who returns to their substantive position; employee working well with a manager, and then is transferred without notice to another team without receiving any acknowledgement for their contributions; well-researched and developed strategies submitted to a Director, whereby the director makes extensive changes without providing feedback or explanation.
  (Confirmed by NHQ, ATL, ON)

Other
- Going on stress or sick leave is being used by employees as an ultimatum if management does not succeed in accommodating or meeting their demands.
  (Confirmed by ON)

- Business Expertise Advisor's (BEAs) are frequently experiencing conflict when they provide feedback to their client group.
  (Confirmed by all regions)

NATURE OF CONFLICT

Recurring patterns emerge when examining the nature of conflict. Challenging interpersonal relationships remain the most common issue cited amongst OICM clients. Effective communication, clashes in working styles, strained relationships and personal issues are the types of concerns that fall into this category. Alleged harassment and bullying follow at a distant second and mirror results seen in the PSES.

Given that most conflicts occur within direct reporting relationships, it is recommended that further investment be made into ensuring managers and employees are equipped to have difficult conversations about how they work and communicate with one another. These efforts will result in higher self-awareness and increased emotional intelligence, key factors in establishing and maintaining strong workplace relationships.

PATH FORWARD

The Office of Informal Conflict Management will continue to support employees and managers in their interpersonal development by proactively offering targeting coaching sessions and creating new and innovative training programs that meet the conflict management learning needs of employees and management. As interpersonal conflicts are addressed, employees are able to focus more energy on performance, productivity and building workplace relationships.

OICM management will be provided with monthly information on trends, making recommendations on how to address them, for consideration and endorsement to move forward. Lastly, OICM is determined to track trends that are identified, the actions OICM took to address the trend, and monitor the results to see if these actions are having the affect OICM is seeking.